

Whitchurch Town Council

Annual Report

2017 - 2018

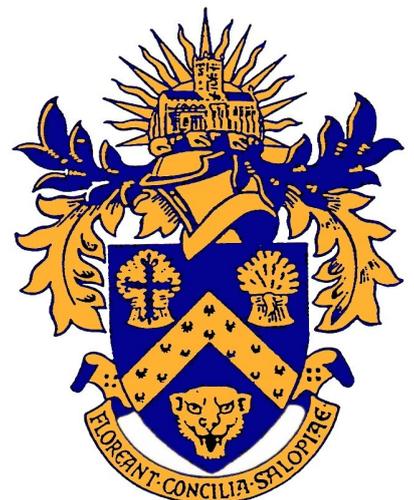


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Contents

- **Message from the Mayor of Whitchurch - Councillor Tony Neville**
- **Parks, Public Realm & Civic Centre Report**
- **Finance & Personnel Report**
- **Heritage Report**
- **Town Team Report**
- **Whitchurch Town Councillors 2017-18**
- **Key Contacts**





Cllr Tony Neville - Mayor & Chairman

Introduction

Welcome to Whitchurch Town Council's Annual Report 2017/18

Since becoming Mayor I realise just how community-minded the people of Whitchurch are. I have received such great support from the townspeople which I greatly appreciate.

The town hosts many marvellous events, too numerous to mention individually. The main ones are mostly organised by our Town Council, including the Christmas Lights Switch-on, Whitchurch Food & Drink Festival, the Party in the Park and in 2017, the Worldwide Whitchurch Weekend.



But the one event that sticks out in my mind is the Town Council's Civic Service, where we were honoured with the presence of eight Mayors from around the County, including Shrewsbury and Telford & Wrekin, along with the High Sheriff of Shropshire. I would like to say a special 'thank you' to our Town Clerk, Nicola Young, for all the hard work she put in to make the service such a great success. I have received countless compliments on the contents of the service. I would also like to thank the Rev Canon Dr Judy Hunt and the Church Office staff for their support, along with all the local people who attended to support the special day in the town.

Congratulations also to our Citizen of the Year, Rose Snell - we had a great celebratory afternoon tea in December.

continued

Mayor's Review continued ...

Thank you also to all the young people, parents, skaters, BMX and scooter riders for contributing to the design of the skate park. Much work has taken place throughout the last year to help make this project happen and Whitchurch Town Council are pleased to announce that the building of this skate park will start in May 2018.

During the last year I have been a member of the Committee which has brought many events and performances to the Civic Centre, including a fabulous Abba tribute night and professional Easter pantomime. Including these events and those organised by others, the Civic Centre is now almost fully utilised by the town.

I would like to thank fellow Councillors, the Town Clerk, Town Centre Manager and all the staff, without whom we wouldn't have a working Civic Centre. It has been an honour to work with you all.

I especially would like to thank my Deputy - Councillor Bev Duffy - for her invaluable support throughout my year as Mayor.

Thanks must also go to the groups and organisations who make Whitchurch such a special place, too many to mention separately. But, the three I will mention are my chosen charities: 79 Sqn (Whitchurch) RAF Cadets; Whitchurch Men in Sheds; and Midlands Air Ambulance.

I am still getting comments on how the town is changing for the better which is very pleasing to hear, as it means Whitchurch Town Council must be doing something right. Nothing changes overnight, but hopefully the progress this Council is making in Whitchurch is worth it to local people.

I will never take for granted the honour of representing Whitchurch as its Mayor, believe me I've been shouting about the town's heritage at every event I've attended all over the county.

Finally, as I come to the end of my first year in office may I thank everyone who has supported me, all my Council colleagues, Rev Canon Dr Judy Hunt from St Alkmund's Church, Mayors from around the County who have given me advice and all the townspeople of Whitchurch who have accepted me as Mayor.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks and appreciation goes to my wife, Pat, for her unconditional understanding and support during what has been a hectic year.



Parks, Public Realm & Civic Centre

Cllr Terry O'Neill - Chairman: Cllr John Sinnott - Vice Chairman

Parks & Public Realm

We have reached the end of another successful year, having completed many projects.



Our parks continue to provide a stunning show of beautiful floral displays and are a real asset to the town. Whitchurch Town Council wishes to thank Nobridge for their continued hard work and dedication keeping all of the towns' parks in good order.

The Council wishes to give further congratulations to Nobridge for the impressive floral hanging baskets throughout the town centre during Summer 2017. Local people and visitors alike made many compliments on the displays.

2017 was a busy year in Jubilee Park. Thank you to everyone who took part in the public consultation to install an extension to the play area. The park now boasts a wooden pirate ship, jungle climber and basket swing, which from visits to the park, the Council can see are being used regularly and bringing much joy to the children and families who visit the park.



After much work during 2017, Whitchurch Town Council is pleased to announce that the skatepark will be built in 2018, starting on 14th May. Having worked with young people, interested parents and skaters, BMX riders and scooter users, the preferred contractor was chosen in March 2018. We are all looking forward to the completion of this long-awaited project. Thank you to everyone in the town who has contributed, either financially or with their time, towards making the skate park happen.



Charter
for Trees, Woods
and People

Whitchurch Town Council have signed up and become a Tree Charter organisation in partnership with the Woodland Trust.

We have planted new trees, of varying varieties and continue to look after the historic trees in our parks. A Tree Risk Assessment Condition Report was carried out on all the trees in Jubilee Park and work was completed in line with the recommendations in this report from the Arboreologist. Whitchurch Town Council continue to look after the future of our trees and green spaces.



Parks, Public Realm & Civic Centre

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Civic Centre

Whitchurch Town Council has set up a Committee to organise events, performances and entertainment @theCivic. From a successful Abba tribute night, to a real party on New Years Eve and ending the Council year with a very popular Easter pantomime, 'Alice in Wonderland', with both the matinee and evening performances sold out and starring our very own local dancers from Maggie Mays Dance Academy. Whitchurch Town Council are continuing to organise events throughout the coming year, keep an eye on the noticeboards, LED screens and town website.



The Community Hub continues to sell tickets for all our events and events organised by others. We work with community events, including the Walking Festival and WAODS, and are the focal point for ticket sales in the town.

The Council have had a good year hiring out the rooms at the Civic Centre and many local activities take place throughout each week, including Slimming World and Weight Watchers, monthly indoor roller skating, along with men's walking football organised by the Beechtree Community Centre and yoga, dance and martial arts classes, plus much more.

The Council have decorated and installed new showers in the stage changing rooms, agreed to resurface the main hall floor and are looking to refurbish the Bar Lounge next year.

Room hire is available for christenings, weddings and birthday parties, please get in touch with the Civic Centre staff for more information.



Staff at the Civic Centre are taking part in an on-going programme of training, but everyone is now 1st Aid qualified, the Facilities Team are all trained Fire Wardens and everyone has received training on how to use fire extinguishers. This programme continues to be built upon through an e-learning H&S training package.

We hope you have taken advantage and read all the notices on the Civic Centre's LED screens. Whitchurch Town Council aim to keep you informed of what is happening @theCivic, information on events run by others in the Civic Centre and about town events throughout the year.



Heritage

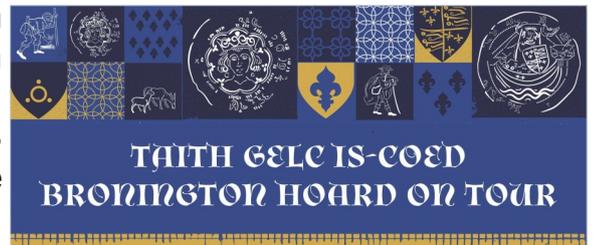
Cllr Bev Duffy - Chairman: Cllr Terry O'Neill - Vice Chairman

This year there has been a programme of maintenance, now completed, to refurbish the sash windows in the Heritage Building; the company that did the work did an excellent job and the windows look very smart indeed.

The Whitchurch Museum and Archive Volunteers, very ably led by curator Dr. Judith Hoyle, have continued to develop new exhibitions in the museum and there are lots of interesting things to see.

There have been several events including:

- Late night opening for the national Explore your Archives Week
- Exhibits from the Bronington Hoard were on show after being kindly loaned by Wrexham Museum
- The author of a newly published book on US Army hospitals in Shropshire and Flintshire visited the museum



The museum has received numerous donations of artefacts and documents, including:

- The Wheatsheaf Fishing Trophy – Junior Challenge Cup 1951-1982
- The Whitchurch School Magazine 1936
- 1919 Peace Celebration Cup
- Many papers referring to Keele history classes taught in Whitchurch in the 1990s, from Dr Paul Anderton
- WW1 postcards from Prees Heath
- A copy of the documents from the National Archives about the rebuilding of Dodington Chapel after it was destroyed by a mob. (Whitchurch must have been pretty wild years ago ...)
- A primitive Methodist Bazaar Mug 1870
- A pewter egg cup from Prees
- A stoneware bottle by Joseph Shaw, Bullring dating from 1870s
- 16 x 18th century brass memorial plaques from Dodington URC (cost £500 divided between WHAG and money bequeathed by Friends of Whitchurch Heritage)



Visitor numbers continue to rise; 2090 people visited the museum between April 2017 and March 2018. Also, many people made online and phone enquiries, including from as far away as Australia.

Heritage

continued ...

The most exciting development is that the Whitchurch Museum and Archive Volunteers have very recently had their application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered and are now called the Whitchurch Museum and Archive Trust.

Whitchurch Town Council has, for some years, aimed towards being able to grant the Trust a lease on the Heritage Building. This is to enable them to formally take over running the Museum and focus on further developing the Museum and hosting more visiting exhibitions. Both parties are now working to finalise the lease and it is hoped that this will soon be completed.

Whitchurch Museum & Archives are the recipients of a £38,826 grant from Arts Council England.

This substantial amount of money has been awarded as a result of a successful application to the Ready to Borrow Capital Grant Scheme managed by West Midlands Development.

The money will be used to replace external doors to the Heritage Centre with up to date automatic and draught-free models as well as purchasing a number of new display cabinets which can be environmentally controlled.

Once the work is completed the volunteers will compile a long-term programme of exhibitions for the town. The new high-spec cabinets will enable local people and visitors to view artefacts loaned from National and other accredited Museums.

Only two Museums in the whole of the West Midlands region were successful in their applications this year and so receiving this grant is a great accolade to the professional work carried out by Whitchurch Museum & Archives, especially Dr Judith Hoyle and David Broad. The volunteers work tirelessly to raise the profile of the town and to provide a museum that the local area's rich and varied heritage deserves.

Whitchurch Town Council wish to give their sincere thanks to all the volunteers, whose continuing hard work and dedication provides the town and visitors with such interesting displays and access to research about local history.



Finance & Personnel

Cllr Alan Chesters & Cllr John Sinnott - Chairmen:
Cllr John Martin - Vice Chairman

Annually, Whitchurch Town Council receives the Neighbourhood Fund element of the Community Infrastructure Levy. This year we have allocated all this funding received to two main infrastructure projects within Jubilee Park:

- Play area extension = £27,500
- Skate park = £30,000

The Council has completed consultations on both projects and installed equipment chosen by local people. We are pleased to note that the skate park project will finally be built in the next financial year.

The office computer systems, used by staff, received a much needed upgrade, including new anti-virus software and integrated electronic calendars for room bookings. The systems are now more stream-lined and provide a better service to our tax payers.

Further financial upgrades include the hire of a card payment machine, now making it easier for people to pay for room hire and event tickets, along with the introduction of a credit card to enable the Council to get better value for money, the Town Clerk can now make smaller purchases online.

Whitchurch Town Council continue to invest in the Civic Centre and Heritage Centre, having agreed to pay for Heritage Centre window replacements and resurfacing of the main hall floor. The Heritage Centre windows were replaced towards the end of 2017 and the Main Hall floor resurfaced in May 2018.

Recognising the need for promotion of the Civic Centre and the Friday Market, the Council have spent money to maximise exposure and increase usage of the venue and bring people into the market. In line with this, we also now have a regular stall at the monthly Makers' Market and have invested in new gazebos, some with the Council's logo, to give us more presence -



look out for these at our upcoming events. A further promotional tool is the LED screens which are on 24/7 promoting events inside the Civic Centre and the town. Whitchurch Town Council invested £2,700 on these LED screens.

Finance & Personnel

continued ...

Whitchurch Town Council has reinstated its membership of the Shropshire Association of Local Councils. This membership enables Councillors and staff to attend training, paying membership rates and keep up to date with all that is happening in the County.

As many people may have read, Whitchurch Town Council still have Councillor vacancies. We have now agreed to pay for Councillor expenses, this is especially helpful when attending training and County meetings in Shrewsbury.

This Council's most significant outgoing remains the staffing costs as with most organisations, but we strive to ensure better and effective use of public money and the Council's assets.

A further significant outgoing is the running of the Civic Centre. The Town Council can now report that Shropshire Council have agreed to transfer the freehold to the Town Council. That means that we will be able to apply for grants to update the building, refurbished tired and dated rooms and work with local people to help deliver what is wanted in the town.

Whitchurch Town Council continue to provide more Christmas lights annually, investing £4,247 to install static lights in Mill Street, tree-wrap the Bullring trees and install illuminous twigs in the trees outside Tesco.



Much administrative work has taken place to organise the money bequeathed to the Council in wills. This money is held in the Public Sector Deposit Fund and is now accounted for within the main accounts.

Following advice, Whitchurch Town Council has now taken over running Whitchurch Cemetery. Whitchurch Town Council thank the Whitchurch Joint Cemetery Board members for successfully running the cemetery over the years. Now that this service has been brought in-house, the Cemetery funds will also be accounted for within the Town Council accounts.



Finally, we are pleased to report, that good fiscal management has reduced the amount of council tax payable to Whitchurch Town Council by 2.9%.

Economic Development Vision

Potential Areas for Development:

Whitchurch Town Councillors met one Saturday to discuss and develop an Economic Development Vision for the town. Following discussion the projects below have been put forward to Shropshire Council Leader and Head of Economic Development:

- Visitor Accommodation. Whitchurch Town Council recognise the need for more visitor accommodation in the town. The town is growing and we are organising more events which, along with the towns' unique heritage and convenient location, are bringing more visitors into Whitchurch. The triangle of land next to the White House School is identified in the current SAMDev for employment land. Whitchurch Town Council suggest this site would be ideal for a hotel chain, as it is on the main route for 3 x 'A' roads.
- Equality of Access to Southbound Platform & Parking at the Station. Whitchurch Railway Station does not have disabled/pram access to the southbound platform. The potential new housing estate on the southbound side could lead an access road to a new station car park. This would solve two issues: overcrowding at the current railway station car park and lack of disabled access.
- Digital Innovation Park. Whitchurch Town Council suggest a digital innovation park, the site at Waymills is currently allocated as industrial employment land in the SAMDev. Key office space for businesses could be developed here within 20 acres of land. The site has good road and rail transport links to Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Chester. The intention would be to attract bigger digital businesses to have satellite offices in Whitchurch, thereby bringing higher paid jobs to Whitchurch and offering further employment opportunities to local young people.
- Faster Broadband would need to be developed in order to encourage businesses to the proposed digital innovation park now that superfast broadband is in the town centre. Phone signal levels would also be checked.

In line with the Shropshire Council Economic Growth Strategy 2017-2021 and its priority areas:

- *Target* actions and resources where there are economic opportunities
- *Enable* businesses to start, grow and succeed
- *Deliver* infrastructure to support growth
- *Meet* skills needs of businesses and people's aspirations for work
- *Promote* Shropshire to investors
- *Build* our reputation as a council that is 'good to do business with'

Whitchurch Town Council are working towards an Economic Development Vision for the town and in close partnership with Shropshire Council.

Whitchurch Town Team

Whitchurch Town Team

Annual Report 2018

Whitchurch Town Team is a committee working to enhance the town in line with the actions from the Town Plan 2011. This is available on www.whitchurch.info

Since the last Town Meeting the Town Team has met formally six times to take note of developments in the town. However most of the work is done outside of these formal meetings. Members of the Town Team are engaged with partners who can help us to complete actions from the Action Plan.

The Town Council is beginning to work more closely with the Town Team as partners in the process. Town Team members have been invited to join Town Councillors to review the Whitchurch Place Plan and have jointly met with Shropshire Council officers to discuss the Economic Growth Strategy for Whitchurch. The Town Team is also represented at the Joint Commissioning and Economic Board, Tourism, Markets and Events Group, and members attended a recent Revive and Thrive Regional meeting held in Whitchurch.

The New Plan Working Group has been meeting more regularly to move forward with the Community Led Plan refresh. Shropshire Council is reviewing the County Plan and we have been in consultation with officers about how the Plan for Whitchurch can continue to be complementary to the Unitary Authority Plan. Unfortunately, there has been a delay in the publication and this has meant that our timeline has had to be amended.

To date the New Plan Working Group has developed ideas for a Green Spaces and Corridors Strategy and a Housing Strategy. Residents have seen the maps relating to these at the Markets' Markets and have been able to give their opinions. Some information on housing need has been collected by means of a questionnaire.

At present the Group is reconsidering how the Plan should be prepared and how wider consultation can be achieved. The Group is made up of a small number of members of the Town Team but, if the Plan is to be completed within a reasonable timescale, more people who are interested in how the Town might develop into the future are needed. If you are interested in joining us please speak to someone at the Town Meeting or contact us via the town website www.whitchurch.info or via the Town Clerk.

This is about the future of the Town – how Whitchurch will look and the facilities which will be required to support the growing population. So – we need to gather together a group of people of different ages and with different views and expertise to develop these ideas. This is your opportunity to shape your town for the years to come.

Please think about coming forward to help.



Council 2017/2018

Mayor & Chairman

Tony Neville

Deputy Mayor

Bev Duffy

Councillors

Alan Chesters

Jessica McAuley

Terry O'Neill

John Sinnott

John Martin

Lee Broders

Andy Hall

Mike Barker

Matt Fewster

Norma Raynes

Town Clerk

Nicola Young

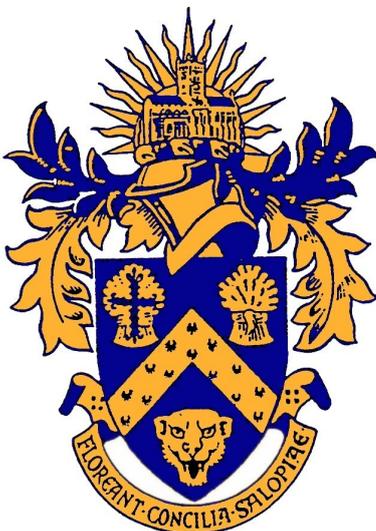
Town Centre Manager/Assistant Town Clerk

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